



March 8, 2013

Dear Members of the Colorado General Assembly:

The West Chamber – Serving Jefferson County would like to express our support for Senate Bill 13-165, “Concerning Authorizing a Limited Number of Baccalaureate Degrees that May Be Offered in the Community College System.” The bill’s sponsors are Senator Nancy Todd and Representative Jim Wilson. We believe that this bill would greatly benefit businesses throughout the state by addressing workforce development needs. We also believe it will greatly assist students and their families by providing greater access to needed education.

As an organization representing over 850 member businesses within Jefferson County our mission is to help build a stronger local economy, to promote the community, to provide exclusive benefits, to advocate for our businesses with government, and to provide leadership and collaboration. We believe not passing Senate Bill 13-165 would adversely impact our local economy and our community. When a policy issue come up that impact our mission and those we represent it is our responsibility to take action.

This bill is intended to provide affordable access to a four-year degree in a career, technical, or workforce field for students who are unable to leave home, usually because of family and/or work commitments. This is especially true for our students in rural communities. The requirements found in Senate Bill 13-165, unlike those found in current statutory degree program authorization, ensure that these technical-focused degrees are in demand in both the workforce and the student body, while being cost effective. To ensure these objectives are being met Senate Bill 13-165 requires a program review and approval process by the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, and the accrediting agencies prevent any unnecessary duplication of programs.

Our community colleges have no intention to compete with other institutions of higher education in the liberal arts fields. The bill specifically states programs would be developed that are sufficiently distinguishable from degree programs offered by a four-year institution, such as dental hygiene, and programs that are restricted to the career and technical fields or in the workforce development area.

Please keep in mind, one of the primary goals in the Colorado Commission on Higher Education’s master plan is to increase post-secondary educational attainment. Senate Bill 13-165 provides additional, flexible pathways for Coloradans to complete their degrees. Our current environment is one where we are competing with other states to provide a quality workforce to retain and attract primary employers. Twenty-one other states have implemented this or a similar policy for their higher education systems with great success for the students.

We strongly urge you to give our workforce and students every opportunity to earn a high quality and affordable higher education degree and in turn give our communities and their employers a stronger and better quality workforce by supporting Senate Bill 13-165.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Brian Willms
President & CEO